

# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
\$2.00 January 2025



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The stars aligned and created great ice fishing conditions in early winter and heading into January in North Dakota. And anglers took advantage of the favorable access to frozen waters across the state as licenses sales for both residents and nonresidents were up for the first time in a number of years in December. The weather was cold enough to make good ice but was nice enough to lure anglers to get out and about, which was a good combination.

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Contributing photographers for this issue: Mike Anderson, Jesse Kolar, Sandra Johnson and Ashely Peterson.

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# NORTH DAKOTA OUTDOORS

PUBLISHED BY THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT

*The mission of the North Dakota Game and Fish Department is to protect, conserve and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their habitats for sustained public consumptive and nonconsumptive use.*

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### Front Cover

A great gray owl, an uncommon visitor to North Dakota, photographed here in the northeastern corner of the state.

PHOTO BY LISA BUCHWEITZ OF LANGDON.



# My 2 Cents

*By Jeb Williams, Director*

The Habitat and Access Summit held in Bismarck in mid-December was a vital gathering for everyone passionate about North Dakota's great outdoors. From hunters and anglers to conservationists and landowners, the summit highlighted the importance of working together to ensure our state's wildlife habitat and public access remain robust for future generations.

A central theme of the summit was the recognition that conservation doesn't just happen. It requires active involvement, strategic planning and, importantly, legislative support. In North Dakota, many conservation programs and initiatives rely on funding and policy decisions made during the legislative session. As we look ahead to the upcoming session, it's critical that we make our voices heard to advocate for the resources and policies that will sustain our outdoor heritage.

Here are a few ways you can get involved to help make a difference:

**Stay informed** – Understanding the legislative process and the specific bills that affect conservation is the first step. Follow updates from the North Dakota Game and Fish Department ([gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)) and organizations like Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever and the North Dakota Wildlife Federation. Many of these groups provide summaries and alerts about key legislation.

**Engage with legislators** – Our elected officials need to hear from constituents who care about wildlife habitat and outdoor access. Write emails, make phone calls,

or attend town hall meetings to share your support for conservation funding and programs. Personal stories about how these efforts impact your outdoor experiences can be particularly persuasive.

**Support conservation partners** – Many conservation projects are made possible through partnerships between state agencies, nonprofits and private landowners. Consider donating to or volunteering with organizations that align with your values. These groups often play a crucial role in advocating for conservation-friendly policies.

**Speak up for public access** – Access to hunting and fishing opportunities is a cornerstone of North Dakota's outdoor traditions. Programs like Private Land Open To Sportsmen are essential for maintaining this access, and the Department asks for your support to continue to grow our PLOTS program with additional dollars going to public access programs.

The Habitat and Access Summit underscored that the challenges facing North Dakota's outdoors are significant, but they are not insurmountable. With a collective effort and a commitment to action, we can ensure that our prairies, wetlands and rivers continue to thrive. Not just for us, but for our children and grandchildren.

As the legislative session gets underway, let's carry the momentum from the summit forward. By working together and speaking up for conservation, we can make a lasting impact on North Dakota's outdoor legacy.

SEARCH

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PODCAST PLATFORM



# ND OUTDOORS PODCAST

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**CAYLA**  
AND **CASEY**



**GF.ND.GOV/NDO-PODCAST**

THE OFFICIAL PODCAST OF THE NORTH DAKOTA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT.



By Scott Peterson

**A**lmost by default, one of the first things that I've reflected on in this space over the years is the weather. Maybe it's the farm kid in me but the weather is a major player in life in North Dakota, including the management of the state's natural resources.

From that standpoint, 2024 was no exception. We experienced a relatively mild winter. While we had periods of cold temps and snow, we fortunately got

a break from the harshest of conditions in January, which likely provided some much-needed relief for our resident wildlife species. By all accounts, we had a pretty good fall in terms of pheasants and other upland game bird numbers, which, again, is probably due in no small part to the relatively mild January that we experienced in 2024.

Waterfowl hunting success in our state is largely weather dependent. While North Dakota is known

for producing good numbers of resident ducks, the best waterfowl hunting opportunities typically result from migrant birds filtering in from northern breeding grounds. Depending on the year, and more specifically the weather, this usually doesn't happen until late October. Once migrant birds get to North Dakota, they will generally stick around until they run out of either open water or food. Last fall, those conditions remained favorable until about mid-November when colder temperatures drove many of the birds south in search of milder weather. I think that most serious waterfowl hunters would have considered 2024 a good year overall.

Deer numbers, particularly white-tailed deer, were certainly not where we'd liked to have seen them in 2024. The list of reasons for that includes a historic epizootic hemorrhagic disease outbreak a few years back and an unusually harsh winter in 2022-23. However, as we consistently remind our deer hunting public, the number one factor in limiting deer production and recruitment in the state is a general lack of key habitat across our landscape. If we are ever to return to issuing the number of deer licenses that we did in the early 2000s, we will need a lot of things to fall into place, including the addition of high-quality wildlife habitat across the state.

It's hard not to look back on 2024 without thinking about the dry conditions across much of the state going into the fall hunting season. The fire danger index in much of western North Dakota was consistently in the high or extremely high categories for much of October. Some precipitation in the form of rain and mostly snow helped alleviate some fire concerns as we edged into winter, but we will need much more of the same in the future. Our farming and ranching friends in the west went through some very stressful times last fall and it is our hope that they never have to go through that again.

By early December, district advisory board meetings around the state were completed. Those public meetings, held twice per year in each of the eight advisory board districts, provided very valuable insight into what our sportsmen and women consider the biggest issues



in their part of the state. While low deer numbers and the increased challenges of gaining hunting access were among some of the most-voiced concerns, the one common theme repeated at each of the eight meetings concerned the number of nonresident hunters, especially nonresident waterfowl hunters. We will undoubtedly have several discussions about that issue in the future, but if a different strategy is developed for how we issue nonresident waterfowl licenses, it will ultimately have to be part of a discussion with North Dakota's lawmakers.

Speaking of legislation. As I write this, we are just a few short weeks away from the start of another legislative session. We will certainly be busy working with our legislators on the various game and fish related bills that are introduced. At this time, the number and context of those bills are unknown but rest assured that we will be tracking any legislation on our website ([gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov)) as we always do.

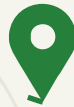
I would be remiss if I didn't urge those who value the hunting and fishing opportunities we have in this great state to take an active role in shaping any new legislation. I think it's much easier to get involved in that process than many might think. The legislative process is designed around public input, so take advantage of your right to voice your opinion.

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**SCOTT PETERSON** is the Game and Fish Department's deputy director.



## WALLEYE PARTNERSHIP.



Arguably, the walleye fishing on some waters in 2024 wasn't as good as 2023, an outstanding season in many regards. While the fish didn't bite for whatever reasons as eagerly last year, walleye populations remained robust from the larger go-to waters to the many fertile prairie lakes.

Natural reproduction aside, hearty walleye populations are the product of the Department's 60-plus year relationship with the federal Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery.

In 2024, the hatchery produced a record of nearly 12 million walleye fingerlings that were released in about 180 lakes across the state. In the last 25-plus years, the hatchery has raised about 245 million fingerlings, which is equal to 40-plus tons, more than any state or province in North America in that same timeframe.

While there is some natural reproduction going on in North Dakota waters, fisheries biologists could speculate that maybe half of the walleyes caught by anglers over time originated in the hatchery, further solidifying its significance to meeting the expectations of walleye anglers across the state and beyond.

Department fisheries biologists say the majority of the 200-300 new lakes that have been added over the last several decades wouldn't have walleyes in them if it weren't for the working relationship between the two state and federal agencies to raise and stock fish.

As the number of fishing waters managed by the Game and Fish grew over time, the demand for more walleye fingerlings increased. In the last several years, a new hatchery record would be set at 10 million fingerlings, then 11 million ... and the bar to ask for more keeps growing.

## SLOW REBUILD.



Last winter wasn't bad. We'll take another one just like it. After the winter of 2022-23, you can't blame us for being a little gun shy.

Yet, while deer and other animals were gifted a much-warranted winter that, if nothing else, increased the odds of does successfully birthing young, the Game and Fish Department again reduced the number of licenses in 2024 by 3,300. The 50,100 licenses made available was the lowest total since 2016.

Though some hunters likely anticipated an increase in license numbers last year, the reality is that while a tough winter like 2022-23 can quickly impact the deer population, the rebuilding process is awfully slow by comparison, especially in those areas with limited habitat.

To get the state's deer population back to where their numbers are tolerable to landowners and where hunters would like to see them, wildlife managers said the answer is twofold.

Depending on where you live, where you hunt, Mother Nature will need to help us out, but we're also going to need habitat. A lot of times hunters just think of where they're hunting. They want habitat that'll hold a deer or hold a pheasant, but that's not necessarily what's needed to increase the population. What's needed is habitat that's year-round, habitat that'll help in those bad winters, habitat that will provide places for does to have fawns, places for fawns to find cover to avoid predators.

## SAFETY MILESTONE.



In spring, the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's hunter education program, required of anyone born after Dec. 31, 1961, reached an impressive milestone of 250,000 graduates.

The milepost is significant for a program that got its start in the state in 1979.

Hitting a quarter million graduates is a testament to all Department volunteers from Grand Forks to Bowman who teach hunter ed in their communities. And some of them have been teaching since the program's inception. It's really an accomplishment in a state that doesn't even have a million people living in it, that over the last 40 or so years we've taught over a quarter million hunter education students and made hunting safer, not just for hunters, but for everyone in North Dakota.

Hunter education was developed in the 1950s in different parts of the country and implemented in North







Dakota by state law, with the goal of reducing the number of accidents occurring in the field.

## PHEASANT NUMBERS UP

Upland game bird biologists and hunters alike were optimistic heading into fall.

North Dakota's late summer roadside surveys indicate pheasant numbers were up, while gray partridge and sharp-tailed grouse numbers were down.

While the state experienced a mild winter and an optimistic start to the breeding season, the wet, cold June appeared to have impacted partridge and sharptails particularly, leading to smaller brood sizes for pheasants.

Hunters were expected to find similar numbers to 2023, with a higher proportion of adult pheasants in the population, smaller partridge coveys and slightly fewer sharptails.

Total pheasants observed (94.5 per 100 miles) were up 25% from 2023 and broods (11.6) per 100 miles were up 33%. The average brood size (5.5) was down 13%.

Observers in the northwest counted 20.8 broods and 164 pheasants per 100 miles, up from 19.1 broods and 159 pheasants in 2023. Average brood size was 5.3.

Statistics from southwestern North Dakota indicated 13.8 broods and 119 pheasants per 100 miles, up from 9.7

broods and 86.2 pheasants in 2023. Average brood size was 6.

Sharptails were down 20% statewide (23 sharptails per 100 miles) but remained above the 10-year average. Brood survey results showed 2.4 broods per 100 miles and an average brood size of 5.5, which was mediocre for grouse reproduction.

Partridge observed per 100 miles was down 20% from the near all-time high in 2023 and remained at high densities (29 partridge per 100 miles). Observers recorded 2.3 broods per 100 miles (the second highest in 20 years), but only an average of 8.3 chicks per brood (the lowest since 2018).

## SIX AND COUNTING

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 2023 bighorn sheep survey, completed by recounting lambs in March 2024, revealed a record 364 bighorn sheep in the grasslands of western North Dakota, up 5% from 2022 and 16% above the five-year average. The count surpassed the previous record of 347 bighorns in 2022.

The survey marked the sixth consecutive year that an increase was observed in the bighorn population.

Altogether, biologists counted 106 rams, 202 ewes and 56 lambs. Not included were approximately 40 bighorn sheep in the North Unit of Theodore Roosevelt National Park and bighorns introduced to the Fort Berthold Indian reservation in 2020.

The northern badlands population increased 5% from 2022 and was the highest count on record. The southern badlands population dropped to its lowest level since bighorns were reintroduced there in 1966.

Biologists were encouraged to see a record count of adult rams, and adult ewes and lambs were near record numbers. Unlike the population declines observed in most other big game species following the severe winter of 2022-23, the increase in the bighorn population was attributable to two factors: higher than expected survival of adults and lambs during the extreme winter

# 7 BIGHORN SHEEP

Licenses made available for the 2024 hunting season. In total, 19,889 applicants applied for the licenses.

# 837,000

Approximate number of PLOTS acres in 2024.

conditions of 2022, and better than anticipated lamb production and survival during 2023. Basically, bighorn sheep are incredibly hardy animals that can thrive during North Dakota's most frigid winters.

Department biologists count and classify all bighorn sheep in late summer, and then recount lambs the following March as they approach one year of age to determine recruitment.

Currently, about 490 bighorns make up the populations managed by the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, National Park Service and the Three Affiliated Tribes Fish and Wildlife Division, just shy of the benchmark of 500 bighorns in the state.

## NUMBER OF BROODS DOWN



The North Dakota Game and Fish Department's 77th annual breeding duck survey conducted in May showed an index of 2.9 million ducks in the state. Wetland conditions across the state during the May survey varied from poor to good, logging the 32nd highest wetland index in the history of the survey. Overall, the breeding duck index was the 30th highest in the 77 years of the survey, down 15% from 2023, but still 17% above the long-term average.

Indices for individual species, except for scaup (plus 23.2%), were similar to, or below those from 2023. Mallards were down 18.7% from 2023 and represented the 30th highest count on record. The wigeon index decreased 42.2%, shovelers and pintails decreased 38.1% and 28.7%, respectively; other decreases were 20.1% for canvasbacks, 12.9% for blue-winged teal, and 7.1% for redheads. Gadwall, green-winged teal, and ruddy ducks

all had similar indices as 2023.

Compared to average indices from 1994-2016, when water and abundant upland nesting conditions persisted on the North Dakota landscape, the total duck index for 2024 was down 28%. The mallard index for this year was well below (minus 42.2%) their average during 1994-2016, and other indices that were below the average from this comparative period, ranged from minus 48.6% (wigeon) to minus 24.2% (shovelers). Indices for 2024 that were above the 1994-2016 average ranged from plus 3.7% (canvasbacks) to plus 18.7% (redheads).

Despite improved conditions that came on late, the number of broods observed during the Department's July brood survey was down substantially (59%) from the 2023 count, 24% below the 1965-2023 average, and 51% below the 1994-2016 average. The average brood size was 6.2 ducklings, down 5% from the 2023 estimate.

Production of Canada geese in the state was strong in 2024, and large-type Canada geese in the state continued to be abundant.

The 2024 fall flight forecast of ducks from North Dakota was expected to be down 36% from 2023.

## NO CHANGE IN BADLANDS



Mule deer densities remained the same in 2024 compared to 2023 following record low fawn production in 2023, reduced harvest and a very mild winter in 2023-24. The 2024 spring index for mule deer in the badlands was 1% higher than 2023, but 4% below the long-term average.

Licenses remained the same as 2023 with 1,600 antlered licenses and 650 antlerless licenses available for the 2024 season.

There remain many challenges facing the future population recovery of mule deer in the badlands. Encroachment of juniper in mule deer habitat, direct and indirect habitat loss due to oil development, predators and weather, including extreme winters, are all challenges facing long-term population recovery of mule deer in the badlands.

## ZEBRA MUSSELS CONFIRMED



Department officials in 2024 confirmed the presence of invasive zebra mussels in South Golden Lake, Steele County, after detecting zebra mussel veligers in routine net samples.



# A record 300,000+

Canada geese counted in the Department's 2024 annual midwinter waterfowl survey.

Follow-up sampling found additional adult mussels in the 331-acre lake that is a popular recreation destination located 13 miles southwest of Hatton.

Due to its immediate downstream connection, North Golden was listed with South Golden Lake as Class I ANS infested waters. These lakes join Lake Elsie, Twin Lakes, Lake LaMoure, Lake Ashtabula, lower portion of the Sheyenne River, and the Red River in this designation. Emergency rules went into effect immediately to prohibit the movement of water away from the lake, including water for transferring bait. Notices were posted at lake access sites.

Zebra mussels are just one of the nonnative aquatic species that threaten our waters and native wildlife. Department officials continued ongoing efforts last year to inform water recreationists about the pitfalls of aquatic nuisance species and steps to take to stop the transport and introduction of these nonnatives.

Zebra mussels were confirmed in the lower end of Lake Oahe in South Dakota in December 2023 by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks staff, and in 2024 the North Dakota Game and Fish Department worked closely with South Dakota to monitor the colonization of mussels in Lake Oahe during the open water season.

The nearest mussel that was found in 2023 was over 100 lake miles south of the North Dakota border, so various early detection techniques were employed to track the leading edge of the zebra mussel population as it established up the lake.

In addition to monitoring efforts, the Department launched a digital marketing campaign and worked with the North Dakota Department of Transportation to place highway signage to raise zebra mussel awareness and promote compliance with ANS regulations.

Also, a higher game warden presence along Lake Oahe was initiated in 2024 to make certain water recreationists complied with ANS regulations and remembered to clean, drain, dry all watercraft and equipment between every use.

## 2023-24 LICENSES AND PERMITS ISSUED

	Resident	Nonresident
Individual Fishing	41,350	18,732
Married Couple Fishing	11,529	6,138
Senior Citizen Fishing	15,711	
Disabled Fishing	251	
Short-Term Fishing		
10-Day		6,724
3-Day		24,661
Paddlefish Tags	3,152	667
Commercial Tags	12	
Retail Bait Vendor	210	
Wholesale Bait Vendor	33	3
Fish Hatchery	5	
2023 Boat Registrations (first year of 3-year decal)	58,387	
General Game Hunting	39,732	47,223
Small Game Hunting	13,203	25,985
Combination License	61,228	
Waterfowl Hunting		26,337
Furbearer Hunting/Trapping	6,034	2,590
Fur Buyer	21	4
Deer Gun Hunting	40,549	426
Deer Gun Hunting (Gratis)	11,810	275
Deer Bowhunting	24,237	3,370
Moose Hunting	218	
Moose Hunting (Preferential Landowner)	35	
Elk Hunting	510	
Elk Hunting (Preferential Landowner)	98	
Turkey Hunting (Spring)	7,082	
Turkey Hunting (Fall)	4,140	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Spring)	644	
Turkey Hunting (Gratis Fall)	294	
Habitat Stamp	100,960	
Shooting Preserve	12	
Fishing/Hunting Guide	346	55
Taxidermist	269	11
Falconry	4	
Scientific Collector	36	31
Swan	1,263	937
Sandhill Crane	2,967	2,794

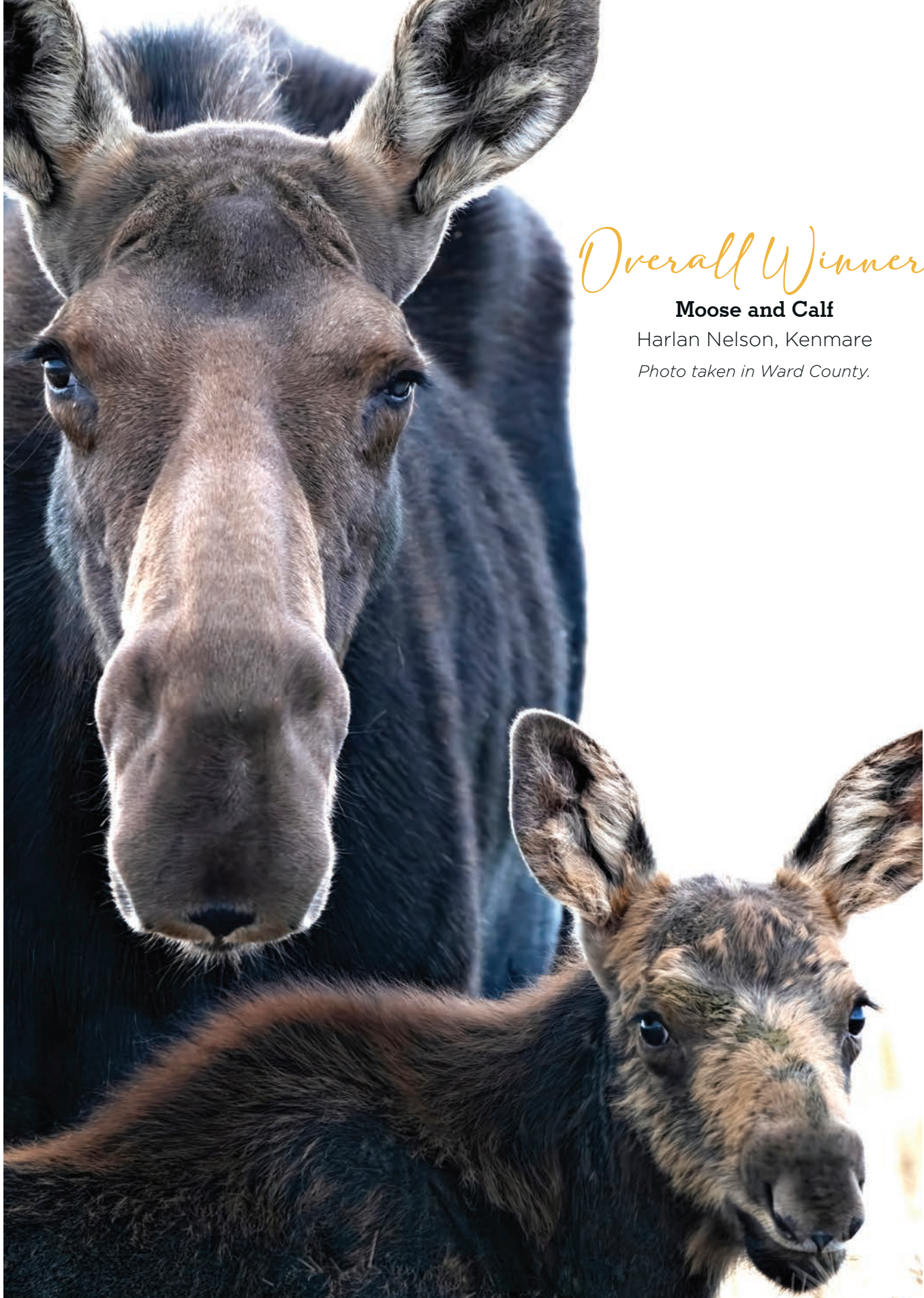
## 2024 SPECIAL BIG GAME LICENSES

	Licenses Available	Applications Received
Moose	238	23,535
Elk	829	25,534
Bighorn Sheep	6	19,889

## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

Income	\$43,180,684
Expenses	\$48,724,951
<b>FUND BALANCES, FIXED ASSETS AND LONG-TERM DEBT</b>	
Game and Fish General Fund	\$22,298,207
Habitat and Depredation Fund	\$7,223,175
Nongame Wildlife Fund	\$151,057
Aquatic Nuisance Species Program	\$786,411
Fishing Conservation Fund	\$158,510
<b>TOTAL ALL FUNDS</b>	<b>\$30,617,360</b>
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>	<b>\$65,754,471</b>
<b>DEPARTMENT NET WORTH</b>	<b>\$96,371,831</b>



# Overall Winner

## **Moose and Calf**

Harlan Nelson, Kenmare

*Photo taken in Ward County.*

WATCHABLE

# WILD LIFE



PHOTO

CONTEST

By Patrick T. Isakson

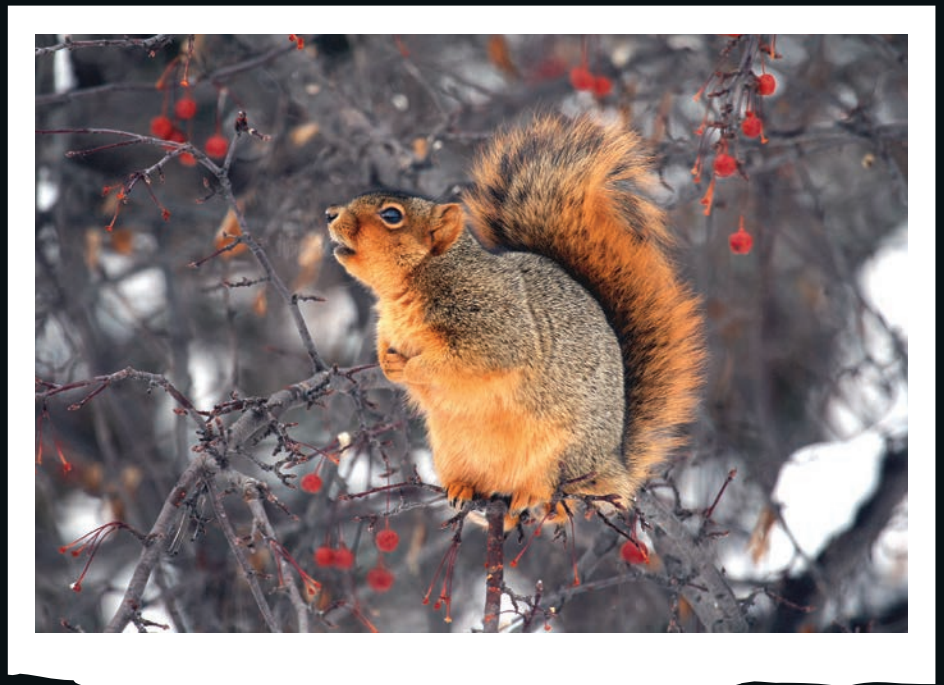
It's been said you don't want to get between a mature cow moose and her calf if you know what's good for you. By the ominous look the cow is giving viewers in this photograph, that's pretty good advice.

Harlan Nelson of Kenmare photographed the winning image for the 2024 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest in Ward County.

There was a time most of these animals were found in the forested habitat of the Pembina Hills and Turtle Mountains located in North Dakota's northern reaches.

Times have changed. Today, moose are found stretched across the state's landscape where suitable habitat is available from the Red River Valley to western North Dakota where the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers join forces.

Even so, seeing one of these big animals wandering across North Dakota's wide-open landscape or bedded in a bean field still takes some getting used to.



*Game Winner*

**Fox Squirrel**

Laurie Ries, Buffalo

*Photo taken near Buffalo.*

---

*PATRICK T. ISAKSON is a Game and Fish Department conservation biologist.*



## Game Runner-up

### Pronghorn

Terry Johnson, East Grand Forks, MN

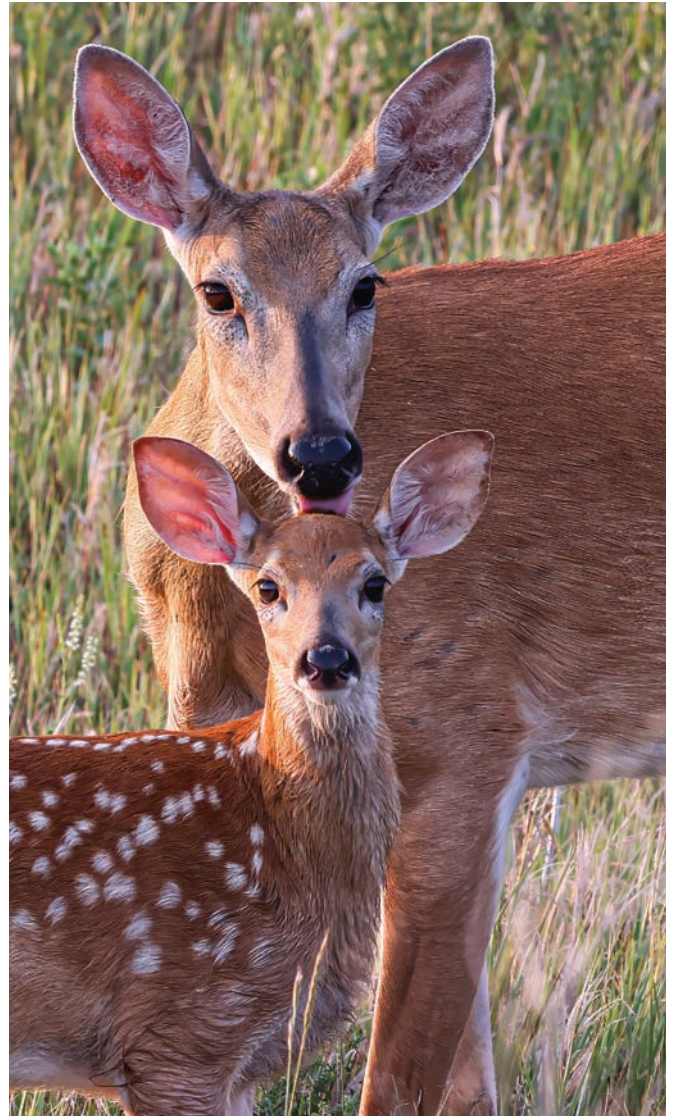
*Photo taken west of Killdeer.*

## Game Runner-up

### White-tailed Doe and Fawn

Tangula Unruh, Bismarck

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*



## Game Runner-up

### Turkey

Michael Zimmerman, Bismarck

*Photo taken near Bismarck.*





## Game Runner-up

### Mule Deer

Albert Myran, Dickinson

*Photo taken in Theodore Roosevelt National Park.*

## Game Runner-up

### Mink

Tangula Unruh, Bismarck

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*



## Game Runner-up

### Red Fox Pups

Harlan Nelson, Kenmare

*Photo taken in Ward County.*



## Game Runner-up

### Common Merganser

Art Mues, Bismarck

*Photo taken near Bismarck.*



## Game Runner-up

### Sharp-tailed Grouse

Michael Van Valkenburg,  
Fergus Falls, MN

*Photo taken in Theodore  
Roosevelt National Park.*





*Nongame Winner*

**Western Meadowlark**

Johnathan Campbell, Bismarck

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*

*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Eared Grebe**

Harlan Nelson, Kenmare

*Photo taken in Ward County.*



*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Black Tern**

Harlan Nelson, Kenmare

*Photo taken in Ward County.*



*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Sharp-shinned Hawk**

Sharon Watson, Buxton

*Photo taken in Buxton.*

*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Long-eared Owl**

Daniel Mason, Fargo

*Photo taken in Hamilton Wills WMA, Cass County.*



*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Bald Eagle**

Travis Walker, Minot

*Photo taken near Makoti.*





*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Spotted Sandpiper**

Lugene Gerber, Bismarck

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*

*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Ruby-throated Hummingbird**

Lugene Gerber, Bismarck

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*



*Nongame  
Runner-up*

**Common Yellowthroat**

Dave Britton, Grand Forks

*Photo taken northwest of Manvel.*



*Plant and Insect  
Winner*

**Brown Belted Bumblebee**

Shelly Wasylow, Arvilla

*Photo taken near Arvilla.*

*Plant and Insect  
Runner-up*

**Sweat Bee on Evening Primrose**

Nancy Secrest, Hettinger

*Photo taken in Hettinger County.*



*Plant and Insect  
Runner-up*

**Prairie Coneflower**

Nancy Secrest, Hettinger

*Photo taken in Hettinger County.*





## Plant and Insect Runner-up

### Cicada

Ingrid Altenburg, Fargo

*Photo taken in Fargo.*

## Plant and Insect Runner-up

### Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Sharon Watson, Buxton

*Photo taken in Burleigh County.*



## Plant and Insect Runner-up

### Subarctic Darner Dragonfly

Lacey Grade, Harvey

*Photo taken near Harvey.*



# Plant and Insect Runner-up

## Goats Beard

Derek Peterson, Portland

*Photo taken near Portland.*

# Plant and Insect Runner-up

## Coral Fungus

Molly Rylander, Drake

*Photo taken at Loon Lake, Rolette County.*



# Plant and Insect Runner-up

## Dogbane Beetle

Mark Broden, Grand Forks

*Photo taken in Grand Forks.*



# BUFFALOBERRY PATCH



## Tentative 2025 Season Opening Dates

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department annually provides its best estimate for opening dates to help hunters prepare for hunting seasons.

Dates become official when approved by governor's proclamation. Tentative opening dates for 2025 include:

Spring Turkey	April 12
Deer and Pronghorn Bow, Mountain Lion	Aug. 29
Dove	Sept. 1
Sharptail, Hun, Ruffed Grouse, Squirrel	Sept. 13
Youth Deer	Sept. 19
Youth Waterfowl	Sept. 20
Early Resident Waterfowl	Sept. 27
Pronghorn Gun	Oct. 3
Regular Waterfowl, Youth Pheasant	Oct. 4
Pheasant, Fall Turkey	Oct. 11
Mink, Muskrat, Weasel Trapping	Oct. 25
Deer Gun	Nov. 7
Deer Muzzleloader	Nov. 28



## Habitat and Hunting Access Summit Recording Available

Landowners, hunters, lawmakers, wildlife managers and others gathered in mid-December in Bismarck to discuss the importance of wildlife habitat on the landscape and providing access to hunters across the state.

Approximately 200 people attended the North Dakota Game and Fish Department's Habitat and Hunting Access Summit where the evening opened with remarks from

Gov. Kelly Armstrong on the importance of hunting to the state's economy, workforce, but most importantly to North Dakota's way of life.

"Every single time someone puts their gun away and says they're done hunting because they can't find anywhere to shoot a rooster, or just to have an opportunity to shoot a couple ducks, that means the likelihood of their kid hunting is almost zero," Armstrong said. "And that's really something that we should work on as landowners, as a government, as sportsmen ... we should do everything we can to make sure that happens as few times as possible."

And there are ways in which we can do this, Armstrong added, and there are ways in which we can have these conversations.

"But none of it's going to happen overnight. But we have to remember that if we don't pass this on to the next generation, it will die out," he said. "It's too big a part of the fabric of North Dakota to let that happen."

Department staff gave presentations on the status of habitat and wildlife populations in the state, followed by moderated panel discussions addressing questions that were submitted by attendees.

The summit was hopefully only the beginning of what will be further conversations, initiatives and collaboration to address this very important topic to our state.

The summit was recorded and can be viewed on the Game and Fish Department website at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

## Coyote Catalog Opened

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and North Dakota Department of Agriculture are again opening the Coyote Catalog, a statewide effort designed to connect hunters and trappers with landowners dealing with coyotes in their areas.

Landowners can sign up on the Department of Agriculture website, [nda.nd.gov](http://nda.nd.gov). Hunters and trappers can sign up at the Game and Fish website, [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).

Anyone who registered for the Coyote Catalog in the past must register again to activate their name on the database.

Throughout winter, hunters or trappers may receive information on participating landowners, and should contact landowners to make arrangements.

Landowners experiencing coyote depredation of livestock should first contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services.

The Coyote Catalog will remain active through March 31.

For more information, contact Ryan Herigstad at Game and Fish, 701-595-4463 or [rherigstad@nd.gov](mailto:rherigstad@nd.gov); or Michelle Mielke, at the Department of Agriculture, 701-328-2233 or [mmielke@nd.gov](mailto:mmielke@nd.gov).

# STAFF NOTES

## Myhre Named Game and Fish Employee of the Year

James Myhre, district game warden for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department in New Rockford, received the agency's Director's Award for professional excellence at the Department's annual staff meeting in December.

Jeb Williams, Game and Fish director, said Myhre has provided exceptional service to North Dakota for 22 years.

*"He knows that helping hunters, anglers, trappers and boaters is only part of the job," Williams said. "James is a farmer and rancher and knows the importance of working with and assisting in his district any way he can. He is one of the highest performers in the enforcement division year after year. He always goes above and beyond in providing exceptional service and represents the Department in a way that we all should aspire to."*

## Game and Fish Recognizes Employees

North Dakota Game and Fish Department director Jeb Williams recently honored employees with performance-based awards. The following special recognition awards were presented during the Department's staff meeting in December.



**Paul Bailey**, south central district fisheries supervisor, Bismarck, was recognized for his research, and managing Lake Oahe and 90 fishing waters in south central North Dakota.



**Dale Reppow**, procurement officer, Bismarck, was recognized for his knowledge, work ethic, dedication and willingness to help others.



**Greg Freeman**, communications supervisor, Bismarck, was recognized for his leadership, innovative ideas and commitment to expanding outreach and marketing.



**Justin Mattson**, administrative staff officer, Bismarck, was recognized for his contributions to every division and for overseeing several major building projects.

## Attention Subscribers

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department no longer mails subscriber renewal notices for *North Dakota OUTDOORS* as the majority of subscribers renew their subscriptions online at [gf.nd.gov](http://gf.nd.gov).



To check the status of your subscription, the subscription expiration date appears on the address label on the back of the magazine.

Also of note, don't miss an issue of NDO by changing your address online on the Department's website. Each month we receive a number of magazines with "no longer living at this address" return labels. Act now to ensure you stay updated with all the latest issues from the Game and Fish Department.



**Kyle Hoge**, fisheries development specialist, Bismarck, was recognized for his knowledge of construction, fabrication and equipment operation in the fisheries development program.



## Waterfowl Biologist Named

**John Palarski** was hired in fall as a migratory game bird biologist for the Game and Fish Department.

Palarski completed his bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife biology at the University of North Dakota in 2018 and earned a master's degree at Tarleton State University in Texas in 2021. He worked as a research biologist for a nonprofit in Texas conducting quail and turkey research before joining the Department.





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# BACKCAST

RW



Three-plus decades ago, I was contacted by federal wildlife officials about doing a story on a pair of adult bald eagles nesting along the Missouri River in McLean County. If you're interested, they said, don't count on getting close enough to get good photos because of the concern over disturbing the birds. And nowhere in the story could I print where the eagles were nesting but was allowed to name the big river the pair was nesting along that flows out of Garrison Dam and winds its way to South Dakota.

Fair enough.

Back then, bald eagles were still years away from being taken off the endangered species list and it was uncommon for verified reports of nesting pairs in the state, so I understood the caution.

Thirty or so years removed from that day we tiptoed over and around deadfalls in the Missouri River bottoms, I still understand the importance of the moment, knowing we were witnessing something through binoculars that, for the time, was significant.

While I'm not immersed in North Dakota's birding community, I've hung around these folks on the occasional Christmas Bird Count and hiked across the prairie in warmer months looking and listening for birds that would go unnoticed by most but would stop these people in their tracks.

I thought about this group of enthusiastic birders when I received some photos in December from Lisa Buchweitz of a great gray owl she took somewhere in Pembina County.

According to Sandra Johnson, Game and Fish Department conservation biologist and earnest birder, the great gray owl, pictured on the cover of this issue of *North*

*Dakota OUTDOORS*, is the rarest owl you can see in North Dakota.

"This is a super rare find in the state ... we maybe hear of one observation a year, if it's reported," Johnson said.

The great gray owl is one of those birds that, if word got out on its location, birders would flock to the area in search of this forest species so uncommon to North Dakota.

"A bunch of people tromping through the forest looking for this owl will not help the bird in its search for food," Johnson said.

These big owls, scientists tell us, need to eat regularly because of their size, which means finding and killing up to seven vole-sized mammals per day in winter.

The Langdon photographer spotted the owl while she was watching some whitetail does. The sun had set, Lisa said, when she caught movement and was able to photograph the owl in the low light.

"I was just creeping along ... I always tell people they're missing a lot because they're moving too fast," she said.

I'm guessing Lisa employed the same tactic last year when she captured a gorgeous image of a bobcat sitting on its haunches in the snow, which was named the overall winner of the Department's 2023 Watchable Wildlife Photo Contest.

Since it's hard to argue with her success, I'm going to take it down a gear in 2025 to hopefully see what I've been missing.

---

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

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North Dakota Game and Fish Department  
100 N. Bismarck Expressway  
Bismarck, ND 58501

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your address, call 701-328-6300 or  
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As we slid into January in North Dakota, the weather across much of the state garnered few headlines, which is a good thing in a part of the country where harsh conditions play a significant role in the survival of deer, upland birds and other animals that must deal with the sometimes-brutal circumstances. With a lack of suitable winter wildlife habitat across much of the state, a reprieve from Mother Nature is always welcome.

PHOTO BY ASHLEY PETERSON



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